

YCWORKS

YOUTH COUNCIL NETWORK

September 2002, Issue #13, Monthly Newsletter

-IN THIS ISSUE-

Join the Youth Council Network (YCN)!

Word from the Hill: Funding Remains in Limbo

NCWD/Youth: Working with Youth with Disabilities by Barbara Kaufman

Alternative Credentialing Programs in Jefferson County, KY

NYEC Seeks Applicants for 2003 New Leaders Academy

Calendar of Events

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Editor:
Willona Sloan

Join the Youth Council Network (YCN)!

The Youth Council Network (YCN), funded by the Department of Labor, provides your Youth Council with the opportunity to share information about promising and effective practices, seek advice from other Youth Council members, learn new perspectives, and discover methods of overcoming the challenges and obstacles facing youth workforce development. By becoming a member of YCN and increasing communication between the Youth Councils, you will strengthen both your organization and the cause of Youth Councils nationally.

As you may already know, as early as next spring Congress will decide if Youth Councils should continue as a part of the workforce development system. In order to make an informed decision, Congress needs to hear about the programs, partnerships, and other activities your Youth Council supports. By publicizing your stories and accomplishments, you will impact the future of youth development, enhance the prestige and value that policymakers and community leaders attach to Youth Councils, and demonstrate that Youth Councils are capable and committed youth advocates in communities across the country. Let us know what you are doing and we will help bring your practices to a wide audience of legislators, practitioners, and communities.

Just contact Willona Sloan and the YCN

staff, at LRG, Inc., and they will take it from there.

LRG, Inc. creates new tools of communication for Youth Councils, provides technical assistance through informational guides like *Sources of Funding for Youth Services*, and publications such as the monthly *YCWORKS!* newsletter, and works with Youth Councils to prepare your promising practices and programs for submission to the Department of Labor's website (www.promising-practices.org).

Become a charter member of the Youth Council Network. Send a confirmation email to Willona Sloan at wsloan@lrginc.org saying, "SIGN US UP!" There is no paperwork. There are no costs. It is that simple. We hope you will join us in this groundbreaking national effort to ensure that Youth Councils become a *powerful voice* for youth development.

Word from the Hill:

Funding Remains in Limbo

With the October 1st start of the federal fiscal year approaching quickly, funding for workforce development, education, and health programs remains in limbo – as does funding for virtually every other federally funded program. As of the 27th of September, not one of the 13 appropriations bills had been signed into law.

The big stumbling block for the appropriations process generally, and particularly for the Labor, Health and Human Services appropriations bill, is the lack of agreement on how much money should be spent on domestic, international, and defense programs. On July 18, the Senate passed a Labor-HHS spending plan that allocated about \$5 billion more than the House had pledged to spend on labor, education, and health. The Senate used almost \$500 million of that to restore proposed cuts to youth and adult workforce development programs, including WIA youth activities, youth opportunity grants, and young offenders programs. Government-wide, the funding legislation passed by the Senate so far would spend about \$15 billion more than the President's budget.

The House has not yet debated its own version of the Labor-HHS bill. Although the legislation doesn't have enough votes to pass the House floor at the funding level requested by the President, the House leadership is backing fiscal conservatives who refuse to add more money. Meanwhile, moderates are concerned about cuts to education, job training, and health programs if additional funds are not provided.

At this point, it is very unlikely that any progress will be made on Labor-HHS funding decisions before the November elections. Details of one or more continuing resolutions that would allow the government to continue to operate after the current fiscal year ends on September 31 are now being discussed. We'll update you on any progress in the next issue of *YCWORKS*!

NCWD/Youth: Working with Youth with Disabilities

by Barbara Kaufman

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability (NCWD)/Youth is ready to assist state and local workforce development systems in serving youth with disabilities.

The Mission

The NCWD/Youth, created in late 2001, is composed of partners with expertise in disability, education, employment, and workforce development issues. Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), the NCWD/Youth is housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership. The partners are the National Association of Workforce Boards, the National Youth Employment Coalition, the National Conference of State Legislatures, the Center for Workforce Preparation at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Goodwill Industries, the Academy for Educational Development, the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition at the University of Minnesota, TransCen, and InfoUse.

The mission of the NCWD/Youth is to ensure that youth with disabilities have full access to high quality services. Specifically, the NCWD/Youth is working:

- To improve the development and implementation of state and local policies which promote full access to high quality services for youth with disabilities.
- To strengthen the services provided by those organizations responsible for delivery of workforce development.
- To improve the awareness, knowledge, and skills of individuals responsible for providing direct services to youth.

Special Regulations

Individuals with disabilities are served under the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), as specified by Section 188. The regulations implementing the nondiscrimination and equal opportunity provisions of WIA give qualified individuals with disabilities the right to reasonable accommodation to their disabilities in every aspect of a One-Stop Center.

While WIA provides universal services to all adults, youth are treated differently under WIA. Youth are defined as age 14-21 and of low-income status. The low-income eligibility requirement may be waived for youth with disabilities. The Act authorizes each Local Board to serve both in- and out-of-school youth.

To assist in services to individuals with disabilities, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), which is the primary federally funded employment and training program for persons with disabilities, is a mandatory partner under the One-Stop system. But VR is not the only outlet for services to youth with disabilities. Through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), education offers a variety of

vices to youth with disabilities in the school setting including planning a young person's transition from school to post-school activities, such as post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The NCWD/Youth will be providing strategies on how the activities for young people within workforce development systems can connect to education and other services available to youth with disabilities.

Breaking the Cycle of Unemployment

Approximately one in five individuals in this country has some type of disability. For most people with disabilities, a chronic unemployment and poverty cycle begins during youth. Compared to their non-disabled peers, youth with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty and be dependent upon public assistance programs. The Social Security Administration reports that many young people with disabilities who receive Supplementary Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI) are likely to remain on the programs rolls for their entire lives. Youth with disabilities, and particularly those with significant disabilities, experience particularly poor education and employment outcomes:

- One third of students with disabilities do not finish high school.
- Only one third of young people with disabilities who need job training receive it.
- Only a quarter of young people who need life skills training, tutoring, interpreting, or personal counseling receive these services.
- More than half of all young people with emotional disturbances are arrested at least once within three to five years of exiting school.
- People with disabilities enroll in postsecondary education at half the rate of the general population.

NCWD/Youth Assists Youth Councils

Despite the statistics, the kind of services available through the workforce development system can reverse these numbers for young people with disabilities. Serving individuals with disabilities involves some thinking and planning, but there are examples of effective practices and information to assist Youth Councils and others. It is the role of the

NCWD/Youth to provide easily accessible and well-grounded information about promising practices and work for changes in the policy and practices of the nation's workforce development system based on this information. The NCWD/Youth will use publications, websites, presentations, and capacity-building sessions to provide the information to those working with young people. LRG, Inc., as staff of the Youth Council Network (YCN), will keep you posted as these resources become available.

"For most people with disabilities, a chronic unemployment and poverty cycle begins during youth. Compared to their non-disabled peers, youth with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty and be dependent upon public assistance programs."

To identify promising practices, develop products, and services in a way that makes sense for the wide array of institutions involved in workforce development services the NCWD/Youth has built a three-dimensional framework. Those who have been involved in the Workforce Excellence Network (WEN) will recognize the framework since it is built

on WEN's work and on the Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award criteria. In addition, the work of the National Youth Employment Coalition, a partner in the NCWD/Youth in developing the Promising and Effective Practices Network (PEPNet) criteria, and the work of the Center for the Study and Advancement of Disability Policy in developing the Emerging Disability Framework have also been included in the NCWD/Youth Framework. The promising practices will be found at NCWD/Youth website at <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/>.

NCWD/Youth works through Practice Networks to identify policy and practice issues of concern, forms of preferred communication, and types of products that are most helpful to their constituents. The Youth Council Network (YCN), which is staffed by LRG, is serving in one of the networks. Members of Youth Councils and staff who work with them who are interested in being part of a NCWD/Youth Practice Network are encouraged to contact Barbara Kaufman of NCWD/Youth by email at Kaufmann@icel.org, or by calling (877) 871-0744.

Share Your Promising Practices

Please submit your promising practices to Willona Sloan of YCN by email at wsloan@lrginc.org, or call (703) 548-8535. YCN will feature selected practices in the newsletter *YCWorks!*, and also format them for submission to the U.S. Department of Labor's website (www.promising-practices.org); in addition, YCN will forward the practices

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to NCWD/Youth for use in its work.

For more information about NCWD/Youth please go to <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/>.

Barbara Kaufman is Senior Associate of the Center for Workforce Development at the Institute for Educational Leadership.

The August 2002 issue of *YCWorks!* featured promising practices from Project Growth, a year-long program for in- and out-of-school youth with developmental disabilities that combines academic training with work-based learning, mentoring, and case management. To view this article, please go to www.lrginc.org/vcn/.

Alternative Credentialing Programs in Jefferson County, KY

Many youth encounter circumstances that make attending and graduating from a traditional high school difficult; if no other option is available, pregnant, parenting, and working youth may drop out of school and consequently consign themselves to low-wage, low-mobility jobs. Has your Youth Council considered what sort of educational alternatives are available in your community for those students who have already withdrawn from school or who are considering dropping out? If you are committed to developing an assortment of educational options to best equip all youth for future workforce participation, we would like to introduce you to a thriving community model.

Jefferson County, Kentucky, is a national leader in the effort to expand student access to high school credits and diplomas. A Jefferson student can choose to attend one of the county's two unique alternative schools, Jefferson County High School and Liberty High School, or to take classes at its online "school without walls," the JCPSeSchool. Jefferson County High School's curriculum is so innovative and flexible that more than 250 school districts in 27 states have adopted it for their own alternative programs. In response to the demand, Jefferson's teachers and administrators now offer workshops and training sessions to accompany their materials. These programs are partially funded by the Louisville, KY Workforce Investment Board, by approval of the local Youth Council, through a Youth Opportunity Grant Initiative.

Jefferson County High School Addresses Needs of At-Risk Youth

Jefferson County's menu of nontraditional school options began with Jefferson County High School. The County Board of Education and Superintendent authorized the school in reaction to a 1980 census report, which estimated that 36.5 percent of the district's over-25 population had not completed high school. District staff anticipated a first-semester enrollment of 200; however, by the end of the semester, the number of attending students had surged to over 700. In their first year of operation, student transfers into the high school reduced the district dropout rate by 30 percent. Currently, about 400 students earn their diplomas annually, and the program has been commended by state and local educational organizations as well as by the National Education Association.

Overview of Jefferson County High School Programs

- JCHS provides an academic assessment for all students.
- JCHS provides career counseling and assistance in post-secondary training after graduation.
- JCHS provides computer-assisted instruction for all students.
- JCHS is designed to serve the entire District and enroll all present and former students who are interested in obtaining a high school diploma.
- JCHS appeals especially to "at-risk" youth.
- Qualified students ages 16 and older may begin at any time. Eligible students include youth 16-20 who have dropped out of school, adults 21 and older, and young adults 16-20 who meet transfer requirements.

The goals of the program are to:

- Provide a positive educational experience for the students.
- Provide a program that will lead to a high-school diploma.

The instructional approach allows students to:

- Work at their own pace.
- Earn the credits needed for graduation while achieving basic skills competence in reading, math, and language.

In addition, the program:

- Operates on a flexible, year-round, extended-day schedule at multiple sites, which minimizes transportation issues and allows students to schedule classes around work and other commitments.
- Optimizes the learning environment.
- Includes a principal, an assistant principal, counselors, and teachers who are trained to serve "at-risk" students.

Jefferson's experienced, specially trained staff supplement up to twenty commercially published books and twenty-three computer instruction programs (NCS Learn) with their own materials, weaving these elements into a general curriculum that can be personalized for each student based on skill level. To earn ½ unit of credit, students must complete a minimum of 60 hours of study and pass competency tests on the material. Because the lessons are competency-based, student progress is determined by hours spent on task and not on a designated grading period, such as number of days, semester, or specific calendar date. In 1995, the district's Independent Study Office merged with Jefferson to offer correspondence courses for students who could not make it to one of their sites.

JCPSeSchool Offers Online Courses to Private, Home-School, and Non-Traditionally Enrolled Students Across the Country

In January 2000, the correspondence courses evolved into the JCPSeSchool, which invites private, home-school, and other non-traditionally-enrolled district students to take online courses at no cost. For \$100 per class, plus the cost of textbooks, concurrently enrolled Jefferson County students *as well as students across the country* can earn credit and an eventual diploma through eSchool classes in Business, English, Math, Social Studies, and other areas, including work-based learning. Whereas students in the district must travel to a designated site to take the teacher-proctored final exam, the eSchool will send long-distance students' finals to their counselor or case worker to be proctored and sent back for grading. The school's web site, powered by Cyber Learning Labs, features class discussion forums, syllabi, helpful links, and many other resources that you must see to believe. Public libraries, community centers, Boys and Girls Clubs, and local schools provide free, convenient internet access to facilitate interested stu-

dents' participation in the eSchool regardless of income.

In addition, for the last two years, Jefferson County and eSchool have operated the high school diploma programs that are offered to Whitney Young Job Corps in Simpsonville, KY, and the Great Onyx Job Corps Center in Mammoth Cave, KY.

Liberty High Offers Life Skills and Career Awareness

Liberty High offers a more comprehensive life skills and career awareness package. It is "designed for students who respond best to a hands-on, collaborative, performance-

based, career-oriented curriculum."

As Curriculum Coordinator Sandra Harris observes, a self-paced, independent learning environment is not optimal for all students. Some need more guidance, encouragement, and engagement with their peers and instructors as incentive to stay on task. Unlike Jefferson County High and the eSchool, Liberty does not offer an open-entry,

open-exit program of study. Instead, the school schedules new student "intakes" four times a year, or every nine weeks.

Liberty High School serves students who meet any of the following criteria:

- A student who has been in high school at least one year and has fewer than five credits.
- A student who has been in high school one to four years and has fewer than 14 credits.
- A student who has been frequently absent from school.
- A student who has failed four or more classes.
- A student who is at least 16 years old.
- A student who prefers hands-on, collaborative learning.
- A student who prefers a flexible daily/yearly schedule.
- A student who desires a work-based educational component.
- A student with diverse learning preferences whose talents are not being developed.

Each cohort begins its Liberty experience with a nine-week, intensive introductory course called Discovery. The Discovery class focuses on life skills such as:

- Team building.
- Anger management.
- Problem solving.
- Conflict resolution.
- Employability skills.

Utilizing the Resources of the Community

Parents of new Liberty students are expected to attend one evening Discovery class per week. In addition, the school recruits community members to speak to its students on a weekly basis, beginning during the Discovery phase. Speakers bring a "real" perspective on a variety of issues, from drug and alcohol abuse to job and career path information.

If a speaker or other employment source piques a student's curiosity, she or he can visit Liberty's curriculum coordinator to arrange a job shadowing visit. For example, a group of eight current students will soon visit a local cosmetology school, which has agreed to give them a tour and information session. These opportunities for personal exploration may culminate in each student's senior project, which requires them to interview a "mentor" in their community who can educate them on a topic of their choice. Past students have explored the Rastafarian religion, various career options, and the existence of "coincidences."

Exploring Partnerships Between School Districts and Local Service Providers

Jefferson County has done its best to keep life barriers from interfering with motivated, able students' access to their high school diplomas. *If credential attainment is a priority in your community, you may want explore partnerships between school districts and local service providers.* To learn more about curricular and technical assistance materials available from Jefferson County or to view the eSchool's nationally accessible interface, please visit <http://www.jefferson.k12.ky.us>. For more information, please contact Buell Snyder, Principal of Jefferson County High School and JCPS eSchool, at (502) 485-3173, or email bsnyder2@jefferson.k12.ky.us; or contact Tom Carter, Principal of Liberty High School, at (502) 485-7100, or email tcarter1@jefferson.k12.ky.us.

Youth Workforce Development in the News

"Youth Employment Councils Wobble"

Youth Today September 2002

www.youthtoday.org

In a critical article focusing on Youth Councils, Youth Today raises concerns about the efficacy of *Youth Councils*, and questions the lack of youth involvement on Councils. The article does include positive commentary about the Youth Council in Pima County, Ariz. and the Montgomery County Youth Council in Dayton, OH. The article also includes helpful resources for Youth Councils.

Need help creating successful partnerships with employers in your community? Do you know how to spread the word to the media and your community about the great things your Youth Council is doing?

View the Power Point presentations "Utilizing Employer Involvement to Create Successful Partnerships" and "Get The Word Out: Working with the Media" on LRG's website at www.lrginc.org/vcn/.

NYEC Seeks Applicants for 2003 New Leaders Academy

National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) is searching for qualified individuals to apply to participate in the 2003 New Leaders Academy. The New Leaders Academy is a competitive year-long professional management and training program specifically designed to equip mid-level youth service professionals with the skills and comprehension necessary to successfully manage and lead youth programs.

NYEC specifically seeks applicants who are mid-level professionals from the fields of youth employment and youth development with at least five years experience working in the field and desire to assume greater responsibilities within their organizations and agencies. The application is available online at www.nyec.org/newleaders.html. Up to 30 applicants will be selected through a competitive process to participate in the program. *The deadline to submit applications is November 1, 2002.*

The cost for this year-long opportunity is \$1,000 if a New Leader is selected (an amount that partially defrays the actual per person cost of over \$8,300 for each New Leader). Employers must allow release time and cover

the cost of travel to and from two one-week residential training sessions over the year, and also encourage New Leaders to devote 3-4 hours each month to Topical Study Group work.

For more information, please contact Mindy Larson, Program Manager, at (202) 659-1064, or email ml@nyec.org.

Calendar of Events

A Southeast Regional Summit: Creating A Comprehensive Youth Investment Strategy: A Community-Centered Approach

Charlotte, NC – October 15 – 17, 2002

The Summit is designed to position your community and/or state to build a youth investment system with a foundation of local workforce strategies, youth-focused initiatives, and education reform efforts. The conference will also provide participants with an opportunity to delve deeper into local action planning while working with national experts to create new strategies. The Summit is presented by The U.S. Department of Labor-Atlanta Region, The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, and School & Main Institute. For more information, please visit www.schoolandmain.org, or call Gene Caso at (404) 562-2382, ext. 129; or Andy Beck at (617) 227-2100, ext. 11.

ETA Region V Youth Development Conference

Chicago, IL – October 16-18, 2002

This conference is for Youth Council members and staff, local elected officials, youth service providers, youth development professionals and their partners. Reflecting the concerns of Youth Councils and program operators, workshops will address issues of program design, leveraging resources, staff development, performance management, and increasing youth involvement. Learn how to enhance recruitment, retention and service strategies, and conduct successful follow-ups. Discover new ideas about partnering with businesses in the community, and conducting public relations for your organization. Also, ensure that programs respond to the needs of youth by encouraging youth to take ownership of the services. For more information, please visit

www.doleta.gov/regions/reg05/Pages/r5eta_Index.cfm.

Make A Difference Day

National – October 26, 2002

A national day of service to inspire and reward volunteers, sponsored by *USA WEEKEND Magazine* and the Points of Light Foundation. Everyone who helps others on Octo-

ber 26th and submits an entry form is eligible for a national or local award, and for a cash donation to a charitable cause. Every award recipient will appear in *USA WEEKEND Magazine* and on www.makeadifferenceday.com. For more information, please e-mail: diffday@usaweekend.com, or call Make A Difference Day Hot Line: (800) 416-3824.

Healthy Communities, Healthy Youth Conference

Minneapolis, MN – November 7-9, 2002

This conference features dynamic, insightful keynote presentations, more than 90 practical learning sessions, networking opportunities, inspiring music and art by youth and adults, and a rich array of resources from dozens of organizations. Participants will learn new asset-building and community-building skills. The conference is sponsored by Search Institute. For more information, please visit www.search-institute.org/hchy/hchy2002/.

Youth Appreciation Week

International – November 11-17, 2002

Youth Appreciation Week is promoted by Optimists International as the perfect opportunity to make a difference in your community by demonstrating a commitment to youth. For more information, please contact Optimist International Programs Department by email at programs@optimist.org, visit www.optimist.org, or call 1(800) 500-8130, ext. 224.

DOL Region 1 Meeting: WIA Learning

Exchange for Youth Systems

New Haven, Connecticut –
November 13-15, 2002

Is your Youth Council grappling with recruiting and retaining out-of-school youth in your local Workforce Investment Act (WIA) programs? Does your Youth Council wonder why partnerships, especially with your local education community, just aren't clicking? Could your Youth Council benefit from advice on how best to decide on skill credentials and use accurate assessments to determine skill attainment? Yes? Then find strategies to tackle these issues at upcoming WIA Learning Exchanges.

The American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF), the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC) and U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (USDOL/ETA) are planning a series of WIA Learning Exchanges for Youth Systems across the country. Learn from host communities that have designed innovative approaches to respond to recruitment, retention, partnership building, credentialing, and skill attainment issues. Site visits to promising programs and peer-to-peer learning will be at the core of the two-day meetings. Dynamic sessions

will highlight strategies to enrich your partnership building skills; and local teams will develop an action plan to apply the exemplary practices back home.

AYPF and NYEC are seeking applications. Local teams should consist of the following individuals: A Youth Council member (preferably the Youth Council Chair), a Youth Council/Programs staff person, and The Executive Director of the Local Workforce Investment Board.

The Learning Exchange will be responsible for in-town transportation and most meals. There is no registration fee. Local WIA teams will be responsible for transportation to and from the host site and two nights of hotel costs. If you need special accommodations for a disability or require a particular service please contact Amy Plotkin of DTI Associates, Inc. at (703) 299-1679 or WIALearningExchange@dtihq.com.

Websites

The Youth Development and Research Fund (YRDF) utilizes hip hop culture and popular youth culture to connect to young people and help them succeed in work and school. In addition, YRDF helps organizations improve capacity through the identification and sharing of "effective practices." YRDF recently published *The Young Adults Guide to Makin' It*. The comprehensive website includes links to other resources, research, and news. The website address is www.ydrf.com/index.html.

Reports and Publications

The Summer 2002 Employment Situation Among America's Teens: The Worst Job Market for Teens in 37 Years

This study found that youth ages 16-24 have been the most adversely affected by the deterioration in labor market conditions. The largest relative declines in employment were experienced by young people ages 16-19, and by young adults without any post-secondary education. During the summer of 2002 young people experienced the lowest employment rate for teens since 1965, with only a 38.9 percent rate of employment.

The report was prepared by Andrew Sum and Neeta Fogg with the assistance of Ishwar Khatiwada and Sheila Palma of Center for Labor Market Studies at Northeastern University, for National League of Cities Institute on

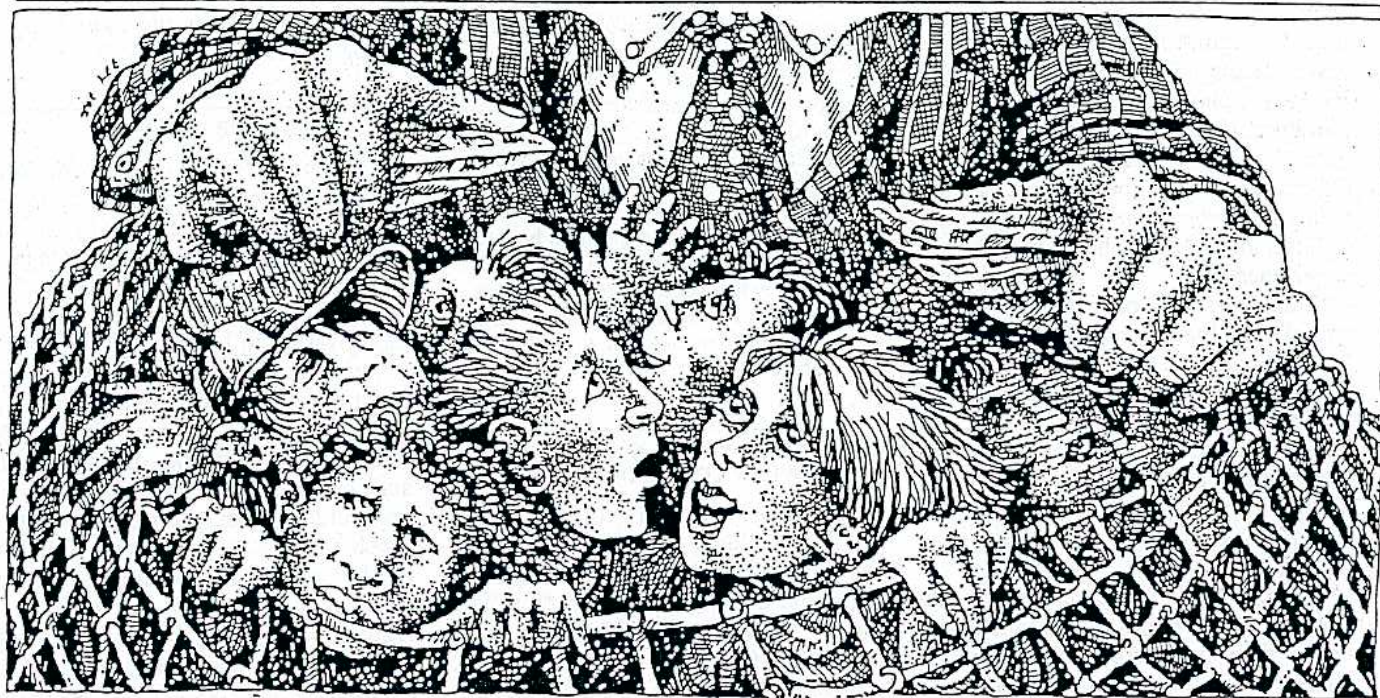
Youth Education and Families.

A Toolkit: Barriers and Promising Approaches to Workforce and Youth Development for Young Offenders

This toolkit outlines the problems facing the juvenile justice system and identifies solutions. In addition, the toolkit provides profiles of effective programs and promising practices, and features innovative state and local policy initiatives.

For more information, call (410) 223-2890, visit www.aecf.org/publications, or write to The Annie E. Casey Foundation at 701 St. Paul Street, Baltimore, MD 21202. Reports can be viewed, downloaded, or ordered online.

Here Dropouts Drop In — And Stay!



In the four years since Jefferson County High School opened in Louisville, more than 5,000 former dropouts have enrolled and 1,100 of them have graduated. Ms. Gross takes a close look at the factors that explain these happy outcomes.

BY BEATRICE GROSS

PRINCIPAL Joe Clark, who appeared on the cover of *Time* and was lionized in the movie *Lean on Me*, used to stalk the halls of Eastside High School in Patterson, New Jersey, brandishing a bullhorn. He insisted that his get-tough message — “Work or Get Out” — motivated his students.

Buell Snyder, a less flamboyant (but more successful) educational director, casts his net widely to entice dropouts and pushouts to enroll in his alternative

school, Jefferson County High School (JCHS) in Louisville, Kentucky. “I’m seeking to draw in students who couldn’t make it in traditional school,” he says. Snyder’s bait is a “come when you can” schedule, a promise of success, and a regular high school diploma rather than a General Education Development (GED) certificate of equivalency. Once attracted to the school, students are held by its genuinely individualized programs that give them, whatever their ages, the respect accorded to adults. “I hire only teachers who agree to treat students with respect at all times,” asserts Snyder, “and I discard those who, despite their good

intentions, infantilize or ridicule students.”

In the four years since JCHS opened, more than 5,000 former dropouts have enrolled and 1,100 have graduated. The school has a retention rate of 71% — an impressive figure for an institution that serves dropouts.¹

Snyder, who developed his ideas for the alternative school when he was assistant director of Louisville’s adult education program, contrasts the relative simplicity of his approach with the attitude of the traditional high school. “We have only one rule for behavior,” he says. “You can’t hurt your chance for success — or anyone else’s.”

ACADEMIC RIGOR

JCHS maintains more rigorous academic standards than Joe Clark’s Eastside High. Students don’t begin to earn Carnegie units in a subject until they are working at an 8.5 grade level. They must also take basic skills courses until they can achieve an 11th-grade level in them,

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and no one graduates who hasn't met or surpassed that standard in reading, math, and language courses.

Although JCHS is designed for drop-outs and will send the majority of its graduates directly into the full-time work force, the focus of the curriculum is entirely academic. To earn the 20 Carnegie units they need for graduation, students take 13 required academic courses and seven electives. Those who enjoy academics have a choice of American or world literature, psychology, logic, or the computer languages PASCAL or COBOL. Others can fulfill the elective requirements with vocational credits from other Jefferson County schools or with work experience.

"Employers and colleges know that our school's graduation requirements are as stringent as any in the state," says Beverly Herrlinger, program coordinator. "Some students who already have GEDs come here because the armed forces penalize those without a regular diploma by withholding bonuses, career opportunities, eligibility for college tuition programs, and other benefits."

In order to make sure that students do their own work and get help when they need it, the school requires that all work be done on the premises. "No homework is assigned," says Snyder. "We insure continued success by insisting that students finish each instructional unit with at least a 70% score before they go on to the next. It may slow them down, but they start new work well-grounded."

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

"We are as interested in placing students on a successful career track as in getting them into college," says Linda Wilhelms, one of three full-time counselors at the school. "Before students enroll in the vocational classes that we will credit toward graduation requirements, we ask them to take a series of vocational aptitude tests."

These tests consist of hands-on problems and use manipulative materials to measure motor coordination, perception of forms, spatial ability, clerical perception, manual dexterity, conceptual capacity, and temperament. The full battery of tests takes between four and six hours. However, by the time they are finished, students know which jobs will challenge them and which they'll find frustrating and boring.

Dorace Peters, the vocational assess-

ment coordinator, comments on these tests:

Yesterday, we tested a teenage mother whose response to scoring very high in mechanical ability was fairly typical. She said that she had always loved figuring out how things worked and had even daydreamed that she might repair machines for a living. "But," she confided, "I never told anyone because I thought people would laugh." For the most part, our girls' ideas of what is appropriate work are 25 years behind the times. They come in assuming that they should go into fashion or hair care. We try to broaden their vision. We also offer classroom instruction on how to write résumés and how to keep a job once they have one. Many youngsters don't know how to ask questions or take guidance. Often they quit when they're criticized.

COME WHEN YOU CAN; LEAVE WHEN YOU'RE DONE

The school is open 12 months a year. The day a student completes an application is the day he or she starts school. Students find that they can easily fit school into their home or work schedule because classes run from 8 a.m. until 9:30 p.m. at seven sites scattered throughout Louisville and the Jefferson County School District.

Students might spend from two months to more than four years at JCHS, depending on the number of credits they need for a degree, their incoming academic competence, and the amount of time they devote while enrolled. "We guarantee that each student who sticks it out will leave academically competent. For people who have consistently failed to catch the drift, that's a mighty attractive promise," explains Herrlinger. "And we're flexible. If a student finds the program too confining, he or she can cut back on time or leave altogether and pick it up again later with ease."

The week a student passes the last final is the week he or she graduates, whatever the day or the month. Half of the graduates hug their favorite teachers and get on with their lives, but the other half return with friends and relatives to attend the next formal graduation ceremony. For those who once gave up on school, graduation can be a very emotional experience.

"My life was changed by the people in this school," says Kimberly McCoy Duncan, who delivered the graduation speech

for her class. Kim had come to JCHS after being expelled from Buchell-Metro-politan, Louisville's infamous school for "incorrigibles." She had been pregnant several times, she had a history of drug and alcohol abuse and suicide attempts, and she had shot an ex-boyfriend. By the time she graduated, Kim could say, "Now education is the most important thing in the world to me."

A TAILOR-MADE PROGRAM

"Our program is so individualized that students can be accommodated wherever they are and whenever they begin," says Larry Tucker, a junior high school teacher who works evenings at JCHS. "Fast and slow learners, old and young, sit side-by-side to learn."

Students focus on one or two courses at a time — and finish those before they go on to others. The coursework is either laid out in workbooks prepared by the staff or offered in the form of sequenced computer courses. Each student gets as much time as he or she needs with the teacher or with the computer. Students working with teachers are required to read the texts and to respond through teacher/student dialogues and written assignments. Students working with computers are required to complete certain programmed materials with built-in assessment tests.

Some students choose to attend school six hours a day on a split shift: three hours in the morning, then a "break" of six hours on the job (or with their children), and then back to school for three hours in the evening. Others come only every other day for three hours or less. Occasionally, a student who is in a hurry to earn a diploma attends all day, every day. "I've already wasted a lot of time," explains James Maddox III, who was at the school nine hours a day for five weeks. "Now I want to finish here so I can get on with my life. In two months I'm planning to register at a community college."

THE STUDENTS

The student body is evenly split between men and women. The racial composition of the school mirrors that of the Jefferson County School District: approximately 70% of the students are white, and 30% are black. Eighty-five percent of the students are between the ages of 17 and 21. About 10% are in their

twenties and thirties, and every class includes a few older adults. "Two years ago we received an application from a retired minister who is 71 years old," reports Snyder. "Each year we've graduated one or two students in their sixties. This year a 65-year-old graduate attended her prom in a dress she had made for the occasion, and she arrived in a limo rented by her children." These adults are drawn from the 35% of Jefferson County residents over the age of 25 who do not have high school diplomas.

Most of the young women attending the school are mothers, and some of them have had two or three children while still in their teens. Others — like Dawn, who left school at age 12 after being orphaned and passed around from one foster family to another — dropped out of school for personal reasons and thought they could never go back. "Dawn came to us last August testing at a sixth-grade level," recalls counselor Wilhelms. "Nine months later she had not only pulled her skills up to the 8.5 grade level, which enabled her to begin working for high school credit, but she had accumulated a third of the credits she needed to graduate."

Some students, like Kim, come to JCHS after having failed everywhere else. Others are sent directly to JCHS — without even a trial run at the local high school. Scott arrived from California wearing a black leather jacket with chains, pants with studs, pancake makeup, black bangs that came down over his nose, and dangling earrings. One side of his head was shaved, and he wore perfectly applied eyeliner. Though he looked fierce, his academic skills were fine. Scott graduated after only 14 months.

Joyce went into the business machine repair program in the vocational school, even though Herrlinger warned her that the "hard-swearing guys in class" would give her a tough time. "She turned that class around in two days," reports Herrlinger.

Not everyone adjusts so well, of course. Joan reports that, when she first arrived, she "sat with friends and talked. We'd take one break with the vocational students and another with our class. Some days, instead of staying around when my mom dropped me off at school, I'd go straight to the Galleria."

"It takes a while for students to realize that they are not working for the teacher but for themselves," explains Wilhelms. "Some need to leave and work before they come back and get serious. We think

that's healthy. When they come back, they are usually serious and graduate quickly."

A grateful mother of a JCHS graduate wrote: "Rick has been shown that he is able to accomplish a high school diploma and has been given back his self-respect. He's a different person and is even talking of college!"

COMPUTER-ASSISTED INSTRUCTION

The linchpin of individualization at JCHS is a computer-assisted instruction (CAI) program. This feature is "especially appreciated by students who are tight on time and impatient for results," comments Tucker. "I've noticed that it helps even the most hyperactive kids to focus."

Principal Snyder explains why he selected the school's particular CAI program, designed by Computer Curriculum Corporation of Palo Alto, California:

It provides the flexibility and outreach we need. It not only monitors the students' progress but responds to it. By advancing students when they get several consecutive questions of one type right and dropping back if a student misses several in a row, the CAI program keeps the problems challenging but well within the students' frustration tolerance.

For a school like ours, the system has two other important benefits. Teachers get printouts pinpointing exactly where students are having trouble, and these enable them to zero in on the problem. Also, because the system's bookkeeping is centralized, a student can transfer from one center to another or take leave of the program and still pick up where he or she left off.

Other school programs around the country have confirmed the power of this CAI approach. Marion Cortez, who supervised federally supported programs in Lafayette Parish, Louisiana, believes that "only a highly sophisticated CAI program can insure that even those who devote a mere 20 minutes a day to reading and math will graduate with solid skills." After it had been running for five years, the Lafayette experiment was selected as a model program suitable for replication.²

A number of educators — such as Gene Karol, the superintendent of schools in Calvert County, Maryland — have successfully introduced CAI programs into the lower schools. Karol reports that, after five years of using CAI in the lower schools, Calvert County students no

longer score in the lowest three stanines. Eighty-five percent of the students are now testing above the fifth stanine, and 25% are in the ninth stanine.³

Aware of the success of other programs and impressed by the results in his own school, Snyder obtained funding to begin a program in the fall of 1988 to prevent at-risk youth from dropping behind and then dropping out. The pilot "accelerated learning" program for at-risk youth served 76 eighth-graders who were working two years below grade level. The students were put into smaller classes and encouraged to use the remedial CAI programs for up to an hour a day. This effort was so successful that it has since been adopted by five middle schools serving students in grades 6-8.⁴

LESSONS LEARNED

There is no question that students at JCHS have thrived under a system that treats them as adults and allows them to determine their own schedules and to work at their own pace. Such humane accommodations account for much of the success of the program. They are especially important to alienated students and to those who left school because of family pressures.

But such measures alone do not help students who dropped out because they had experienced continual frustration and academic failure. According to controlled studies, these students need more than smaller classes and more contact with teachers.⁵ They need the use of a sophisticated CAI program that "guarantees" success, is unremittingly reinforcing, helps them to focus, and seduces them to do just a little bit more each time they sit down.

1. This figure represents the annual rate; monthly attendance varies.
2. For a detailed account of the Lafayette Parish CAI program, see Steven Hotard and Marion Cortez, *Evaluation of Lafayette Parish Job Training Summer Remedial Program '4'* (Lafayette, La.: Lafayette Parish School Board, 1987). For a copy of this report, write to: Supervisor, Federally Supported Programs, P.O. Drawer 2158, Lafayette, LA 70502.
3. This finding has been validated by Gilbert Austin of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, who has been conducting a study of the correlation between CAI and student learning in this and other programs.
4. For further information on programs at JCHS, contact Buell Snyder, Jefferson County High School, 4409 Preston Highway, Louisville, KY 40213.
5. Hotard and Cortez, op. cit. K

